

MUBARAK'S OUSTER ANNIVERSARY

# Egypt braces for strikes

AFP, Cairo

Activists planned a day of civil disobedience in Egypt to mark exactly a year since they toppled Hosni Mubarak but left an increasingly unpopular but defiant military in charge.

The call for strikes in universities and workplaces comes after a series of protests pressuring the military to transfer power immediately to civilians, rather than wait for planned presidential elections later this year.

Students from Egypt's main universities were to begin protests from 0800 GMT, and others were expected to head to the iconic Tahrir Square -- the epicentre of the protests that toppled Mubarak.

State television said transport workers will not be going on strike and the state-owned daily Al-Ahram headlined: "The people reject civil disobedience."

The military has said it will deploy additional troops across the country in response to the call for a day of disobedience.

On Friday, thousands of protesters snaked through Cairo's streets to bypass military cordons and reach the defence ministry, chanting: "Down with military rule!"

In a statement read out on state television late on Friday, the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) said it would not bow to threats or plots against the state.

The call for strikes and protests has divided the country's political forces, with the Muslim Brotherhood -- the big winner in recent parliamentary elections -- coming out against it.



Myanmar opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi is greeted by supporters yesterday as she travels in a convoy to Wahtheinkha village in Kawhmu township outside Yangon where she will contest a seat in parliament in the April 1 by-election. Suu Kyi was greeted by cheering crowds who gathered to have a glimpse of her.

PHOTO: AFP

## Suu Kyi hits election campaign trail

AFP, Kawhmu

Myanmar opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi was greeted by cheering crowds yesterday as she hit the campaign trail in the constituency where she is standing for parliament for the first time.

Thousands of excited supporters lined the roads to greet her convoy, waving flags of her National League for Democracy (NLD) party and photos of Suu Kyi and her father, Myanmar's independence hero Aung San.

The democracy icon has already made two campaign trips outside the city ahead of April's by-elections, but this is her first day taking to the streets of the rural township of Kawhmu, where she is contesting the vote.

Shouts of "We warmly welcome mother Suu!" and "Long live Daw (Aunt) Aung San Suu Kyi!" rang out amid the cheers.

## NEWS IN brief

### Anonymous hacks CIA website

AFP, Washington

The website of the Central Intelligence Agency was briefly inaccessible on Friday after the hacker group Anonymous claimed to have knocked it offline.

"CIA Tango down," a member of Anonymous said on @YourAnonNews, a Twitter feed used by the group. "Tango down" is an expression used by the US Special Forces when they have eliminated an enemy.

Asked about the apparent website outage, a CIA spokeswoman said: "We are aware of the problems accessing our web site, and are working to resolve them."

The website was restored shortly thereafter.

### Obama to honour Amartya Sen

AFP, Washington

US President Barack Obama on Monday will award the national medals of arts and humanities to actor Al Pacino and Nobel Prize winner Amartya Sen of India, the White House announced.

Along with Al Pacino, the national medal of arts will be awarded to painter Will Barnett, poet Rita Dove and philanthropist Ruth Pulitzer among others.

Amartya Sen won his Nobel Prize for economics in 1998 for his studies of the roots of poverty. He will receive a national medal for humanities, the White House said.

### Amitabh undergoes surgery

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

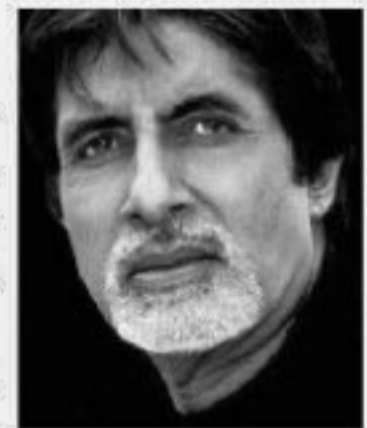
Bollywood megastar Amitabh Bachchan yesterday underwent a successful abdominal surgery at a hospital in Mumbai, said his son Abhishek Bachchan.

The 69-year old actor, who has a history of stomach ailments since his intestinal injury on the set of 1982 film "Coolie".

Earlier, doctors updated the media about the surgery, which has left the actor's millions of fans concerned about his health.

"The patient was wheeled into the operation theatre around 9:00am and doctors involved in the operation have said there are no complications," hospital's spokesman Dr Asthana told reporters.

"All vital parameters of Bachchan are normal. He was cheerful when wheeled into the operation theatre and before going for the operation he visited a temple on the hospital premises," he said.



## NBR sniffs

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at \$4.433 crore (around Tk 371 crore based on yesterday's rate at Tk 83.83).

NBR is working to ensure taxes from the sale of tickets as well. Shihab Trading International has bought the rights to sell tickets from Game on Sports for Tk 45 crore. A total of 33 matches will be played in this tournament.

The sponsorship and transactions from advertisements will also come under the NBR scanner, said officials.

"We have found many transaction points in the tournament," Kanon Kumar told The Daily Star.

He said a number of sub-teams have already been formed to scrutinise transactions in connection with hiring of players. The auction for 54 foreign cricketers stood at \$3.75 million while for local players at \$2.27 million.

The NBR has also sent letters to the stakeholders, including owners of the franchises, Game on Sports

and its local agent ImportEx BD, asking them to pay taxes timely and as soon as a transaction takes place, said Kanon Kumar.

Under the move, the revenue administration is likely to ask the stakeholders to send documents of contracts in the BPL.

Kanon Kumar said the monitoring team has already had two meetings with the stakeholders of the big event. "Responses so far are good. Everybody wants to cooperate," he added.

As per the rule, NBR will deduct 25 percent tax against payment to foreign players and 10 percent in case of local cricketers. Some five percent tax will be ensured from each bid auction, according to the official.

"It's a mega tournament and multi-dimensional transactions will take place here involving a huge amount of tax," said Kanon Kumar, adding, "We will ensure that the government is not deprived of any taxes."

## Opposition to get Arab nod soon

AFP, Doha

Arab recognition of the opposition Syrian National Council is imminent, SNC member Ahmed Ramadan said in Qatar yesterday, ahead of key talks in the Egyptian capital on the crisis.

"We have confirmations of an Arab recognition (of the SNC) that will soon take place, though not necessarily on Sunday," when the Arab League holds a ministerial meeting on Syria in Cairo, Ahmed Ramadan told AFP.

"But there will be strong signals on Sunday, especially from Gulf Cooperation Council states," whose foreign ministers will also meet in Cairo before joining the Arab League meeting, Ramadan said.

## Syria crisis heads to UN assembly

BBC ONLINE

The United Nations General Assembly is becoming the focus of attempts to apply pressure on the Syrian government over its continued crackdown on dissent.

Saudi Arabia is circulating a draft resolution calling for an end to violence by all sides and for President Bashar al-Assad to step aside.

It is similar to one which Russia and China vetoed in the Security Council.

The diplomatic move came as Syrian tanks and artillery continued to bombard parts of the city of Homs.

Opposition activists said the Baba Amr district - a centre of anti-government protests - had been hit by mortars yesterday killing at least 15 people, and that army snipers had been deployed on rooftops.

After a week under shellfire and virtual siege, conditions in Homs are reported to be getting desperate, with basic supplies running low.

Meanwhile, Syria's state news agency reported that the director of the Hamish military hospital in Damascus, Brigadier Dr Isa al-Kholi, had been shot dead yesterday by an "armed terrorist group".

The BBC's Jim Muir, in neighbouring Lebanon, says that although several officers of similar rank have been killed in combat in recent weeks, this is believed to be the first assassination of such a senior military figure in Damascus since the uprising against President Assad began in March.

## Govt sees surplus power

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minister said it is usual that the supply of power in the country is far behind the demand for it. "But we expect that by next year, there will be surplus power supply," Muhith said.

At the programme organised by the power and energy ministry, and participated by top officials of all the energy sector entities, Muhith noted that the government has taken a bold initiative in the sector considering the financial involvement to achieve the goal of ending energy crisis.

"If the power crisis is not resolved through this initiative, this will be seen as our (govt's) political failure in the future. We believe this spending will not go in vain," he said at the ceremony, also addressed by the prime minister's energy adviser Tawfiq-e-Elahi Chowdhury and State Minister for Power Enamul Haq.

Muhith said instead of relying on one primary source of energy, the government is diversifying and relying on five sources --

coal, natural gas, liquid fuel, nuclear power and power import from India, Nepal and China.

"We shall reduce dependency on fuel oil within five years. Those who criticise it do not see the long term picture," the finance minister said. "If we had not spent for oil-based power, development would not have taken place."

The workshop was participated by Power Division Secretary Abul Kalam Azad, Energy Division Secretary Mezbah Uddin and high officials of Petrobangla, Power Development Board (PDB) and other energy sector entities.

PDB Chairman ASM Alamgir Kabir said the country will gradually rely more on coal, instead of gas, for generation of power in the future due to scarcity of gas supply.

Petrobangla chairman Hussain Mansur said at present the gas shortage is more than 400 million cubic feet per day (mmcf) but he expressed hopes that gas production will double within three years.

## Propose; agitation

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ground that the Supreme Court had declared the provision illegal and unconstitutional.

The country's constitution does not approve of the caretaker government, which is constituted by some "unelected persons", the minister told reporters after attending a workshop in the city.

Urging the opposition parties to table their proposal on the issue in parliament, he said, "It is not possible for the opposition parties to restore the caretaker government system by waging a movement on the streets."

The minister said the formation of the new Election Commission (EC) was legal and constitutional.

There was no need to enact a law to do that.

He said the president had appointed the EC in line with the recommendations put forth by the search committee, which was formed through a gazette notification.

The four-strong search panel was assigned to pick the names of eligible persons for the posts of chief election commissioner and four other commissioners.

Shafique also said it was for the first time an EC had been constituted through following such a neutral and transparent course.

At the workshop, the minister said the government was about to finalise the amendment to the related laws for disposing of

At the workshop, top officials made a set of recommendations for the government to implement to ensure a better-managed energy sector.

They all recommended withdrawal of all kinds of subsidy for fuel oil and natural gas, intensive exploration in onshore and offshore areas, and phasing out inefficient and old power plants within the next three years.

Some of the recommendations included starting land acquisition for future power plants with a total production capacity of 39,000 megawatts and setting up quickly power interconnection with Tripura, Bhutan and Myanmar. Possibilities of interconnection with China can also be explored as China is resourceful in terms of nuclear, thermal, hydro and other types of power generation.

The workshop discussed that the cost of power generation at Rooppur Nuclear Power Project, which is set to be implemented in cooperation with Russia, would be Tk 3 per kilowatt hour. The cost is considered as low, if not the lowest.

## Tension escalates over Falklands dispute

### Argentina accuses UK of deploying nuke weapon

AFP, United Nations

Argentina on Friday accused Britain of sending nuclear weapons to the disputed Falkland islands, while UN leader Ban Ki-moon appealed to both sides to avoid an "escalation" of their sovereignty battle.

With both countries about to commemorate the 30th anniversary of the Falklands War, Argentina's Foreign Minister Hector Timerman called the islands "the last refuge of a declining empire."

Britain's UN ambassador said his country would "robustly" defend the Falklands and while Britain wanted talks with Argentina, he insisted there could be no sovereignty negotiations unless the population wanted it.

Timerman said Britain had sent a nuclear submarine to the South Atlantic and was "militarising the region" in breach of a 1967 Latin American treaty which bans the presence, pursuit or use of nuclear weapons.

Argentina invaded the islands, which it calls the Malvinas, in 1982 and Britain sent a

naval force to reclaim the territory.

Timerman made a complaint to the UN secretary general and UN Security Council about the "militarisation" but it was unclear whether it had demanded any followup action.

After talks with Timerman, Ban "expressed concern about the increasingly strong exchanges between the governments of Argentina and the United Kingdom," a UN spokesman said. Ban said he was ready to use the UN's "good offices to resolve this dispute" if both sides requested.

Britain's UN envoy Mark Lyall Grant would not comment on whether a nuclear submarine was near the Falklands. But he said the claims of militarisation were "rubbish" and "manifestly absurd."

"We are not looking to increase the rhetoric. We have not started a war of words," he said.

"But clearly if there is an attempt to take advantage ... by Argentina then we will obviously defend our position and defend it robustly."

## Romney looks for win in Maine

AP, Portland

Mitt Romney is looking to overcome his struggle to win his party's sceptical conservative wing and avoid a fourth consecutive defeat at the polls on the path to the Republican presidential nomination yesterday in Maine.

The Maine election comes at a critical time in Romney's quest to become the party nominee who will take on President Barack Obama, instead of merely the frontrunner in the state-by-state race.

Maine officials were to announce a winner yesterday evening, a day after the former Massachusetts governor delivered a high-profile Washington address in which he described himself as "a severely conservative Republican governor."

## ROW OVER MINORITY QUOTA Indian minister vows to ensure rights of Muslims

PTI, Uttar Pradesh

Sticking to his stand on minorities, Congress leader Salman Khurshid has said he would ensure the rights of Pasmanda Muslim community even if the Election Commission "hangs" him.

Addressing an election rally in Khatakpur locality on Friday night, the Law Minister said that EC had censured him, but even if the "Commission hangs him or does anything else," he would ensure that people of Pasmanda community get their rights.

"Can't I even say that Pasmanda Muslims would get their due?" he said, adding that Congress was set to hoist the tricolour in the state Assembly after 22 years.

The Commission had censured Khurshid for his remarks on sub-quota for minorities, finding them to be a violation of the model code of conduct for elections.

Khurshid, while campaigning for his wife Louise, a Congress candidate from Farrukhabad Assembly constituency in Uttar Pradesh, had promised the electorate last month that the party would increase the sub-quota for minorities to nine per cent, out of the 27 per cent Other Backward Classes (OBC) reservation.

The EC order had come on BJP's complaint about Khurshid's remarks, asking the Commission to take action against him for violation of model code of conduct.

## India to carry essentials

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the northeastern states using Bangladesh port Ashuganj and roadways connected to the NE," Tripura Food and Civil Supplies Minister Manik Dey told reporters.

Syraj Hussain, FCI chairman-cum-managing director, informed this to the minister at a meeting in New Delhi on Thursday.

The FCI has already floated tenders to select the transporters. In the first consignment, 5,000 metric tonnes of rice, wheat and sugar would be ferried to Tripura from West Bengal's Haldia port via Ashuganj port. The essentials would be carried in association with Inland Water Transport Authority of Bangladesh.

The northeastern Indian states have largely been dependent on supply of food grains from other states, especially Punjab and Haryana.

Due to shortage of rail wagons, inadequate storage facilities and various other bottlenecks, the northeastern states have been suffering from poor supply of food grains for most part of the year, especially during the monsoon.

During the monsoon (June to September), road transport becomes very difficult in the mountain regions due to landslides, floods and other calamities.

Surface connectivity is a key factor as the hilly region is surrounded by Bangladesh, Myanmar, Bhutan and China, and the only land route to these states from within India is through Assam and West Bengal.

For ferrying goods, essentials and heavy machinery from abroad and other parts of the country, India has long been demanding land, sea and rail access to the northeast through

Bangladesh, which shares a 4,095-km border with India.

Agartala via Guwahati, for instance, is 1,650km from Kolkata and 2,637km from New Delhi. The distance between the Tripura capital and Kolkata via Bangladesh is just about 350km.

Earlier, Dhaka had allowed state-owned Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) to transport over dimensional cargos of the 726MW Palatana mega power project in southern Tripura using the Ashuganj port, 40km west of Agartala city.

The oversized heavy turbines and other heavy machines for ONGC's Palatana power project, carried on massive 140-wheeled trucks, had reached the site from Haldia port in West Bengal after being trans-shipped through Bangladesh.